‘Two bi guys meet on a train and have the most fucked up one-night stand you’ve ever heard of’

A short story by me

8pm

The train to London was ready to leave by the time the late-December sun had set. Sat stable next to the face of a lead-colour mountain that's crevices were packed with soft snow. The spot around was quiet and the weather whilst forgiving was unpleasant and to be avoided. The train itself was an appropriate refuge from such conditions; the warm mahogany features cast throughout its three-metre width, the feeble but appreciated air-conditioning and best of all the thick woolen sheets sprawled across each and every bed in a private room.

“This will do.” Liam said quietly to himself as he stowed his ca--ry on underneath his bed. His small room was one of the nicer ones on the train as it boasted a window that wouldn’t face the mountains – rather the great meadows of glistening white so far out that you would swear it went on forever. Except it didn’t. The man was thin and pale,

brown hair and brown eyes with high cheekbones and additionally was exhausted. He laid down on his bed and was ready to fall asleep until a rumble in his stomach rumbled through the room. *Hungry.*

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On the other end of the train was Henry who was the last one on the train. He was dark in complexion and had tight blonde curls that bounced around his forehead as he walked. He was particularly fashionable. His room didn't have a window. He had originally planned on sleeping as soon as he got on the train at 7:30pm but decided instead that he would read on the platform amongst the fresh air until he saw people eating in the dining car when he would get on and eat with them. Surely at 8pm they did and Henry was just another serving himself dinner rolls with butter.

It was a quiet service, some twenty odd people at varying ages but none as seemingly young as Liam and Henry who had only been out of their secondary education for two or three years respectively. Liam was on the sports team at his school in Crawley whereas Henry was the spelling bee winner at his regional competition in Bedford. Both of them were leaving Plymouth after they visited family for Christmas.

Despite the small number of people on the service all of the se--ats were taken by couples and siblings and friends, leaving Liam and Henry to sit across from one another. Of course there were the usual formalities; *How are you? Where are you headed? You been in Plymouth long?* And all their answers were the same; *Good thanks. London. No just for Christmas.* And really that's all it took for the considerations of politeness to shrink into colloquials.

"I sense something off about you." One of them smiled.
"Likewise." The other smiled too. Rare snow had begun to fall.

“Tell me about your last partner.” Henry asked of Liam. Suspicions confirmed. Liam didn’t hesitate, knowing this entire exchange would someday be entirely forgotten.
“He was from Wembley- wait no that was the one before the girl from Richmond. So it was a girl from Richmond. She was a bit posh for me.” He laughed as he looked out the window. Smudged amber light persisted through the snowflakes. “What about you?” Asked Liam.
“Oh I haven’t really been with anyone. But I figured I fancied men too when I had a bit of a crush on Sean Connery. Strange, I know. But did *you* know he used to be a body-builder?” He asked. Liam didn’t. The conversation dissolved after Liam provided a few dry answers by way of being so incredibly tired. And so they split ways just before 9pm.

9pm

There was much tossing and turning before the both of them gave up trying to sleep. Henry was having nightmares about a dark bird that had invaded his home and Liam frankly couldn't stop thinking about his ex-girlfriend from Richmond and how perhaps he had never really given himself the time to be sad that it didn't work out, and then subsequently resent her for it. That was the spiral that landed the both of them back into the dining car, Henry first and Liam last but not least.

The lights were off in the car, blown up blue by the moonlight r--eflecting off of the snow outside. How stunning the reflections move like water on the bottom of a pool. Liam softly shut the door behind him and turned around to the fright of another person in the car. He yelped and then clapped his hand over his mouth. Henry shot his head around and also clapped his hand over his mouth out of laughter.

“Oh my god, I’m so sorry.” He offered.
“No, that's fine. Holy shit you scared me though.” Liam said as he went to sit down across from Henry in the exact same way as the hour earlier. Henry looked back down at his book, expecting nothing of the insignificant reunion but thought to himself about Liam’s abrupt disengagement from the conversation just 45 minutes earlier.
“Did I say something to offend you?” He asked. Liam looked away from the window that had attracted his gaze and asked Henry what he meant. He explained it.
“Oh no, not at all. I was just tired. I tried to sleep just now but I couldn’t for some reason.” He answered.
“Yeah same.” Henry replied.

The two of them sat there for some time talking about the train and why they were headed to London despite neither living there at the moment. Henry was heading there to find an urn for the ashes he would soon be collecting whilst Liam was there to pick up his last few things from Richmond before he headed back home. Simply put, the both of them were in varying states of saying *goodbye*.
“Who’s ashes are they if you don’t mind me asking?” Liam prodded.
“Doesn’t matter, they’re just ashes.” His own apathy twisted in his core for which he blamed Liam for a second, though exemplified healing as he punished himself in his mind for doing so; *stupid, stupid, stupid.*

“But… you know, it might come to be true that none of us are here by this time next month.” Henry said as he pointed to the date on the LED display next to the exit.

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“What happens when those nines become zeros? What if they don’t?” Henry asked with no intention of answer. But Liam indulged.

“You talking about this Y2K thing? You believe it?” He squinted at Henry.
“Well if it doesn’t happen then that’s cool but just in case it does I’ve decided to be a bit reckless for these last couple days of the decade… the century… the millennium!” He exclaimed. They smiled at one another with no thought of emotional contribution in mind. But it was building.
“So what does reckless mean in Henry’s world?” Liam asked. Henry finally put his book down and stared intently at the man opposite him, contemplating the newfound ethos of truth within him.
“Yeah I’m a fucking liar. I haven’t been reckless but I think once I get to London there’ll be a bit of a pub crawl.” He blurted out. They both laughed and clapped their hands.
“It’s hard to come across people as honest as you Henry, but it’s nice. More people should be like it.” Liam said. There was a warmness in between them now that neither of them knew what to do with.

“Well. Your turn then! If the world ends in three days then what do you want to have done?” Henry asked. He thought about the question for a moment longer than he expected but regrouped back to the first thing that came to his mind.
“You know I never climbed a mountain.” He said, pointing to the one that the train was curving around as they spoke. Henry’s eyes went wide and his eyebrows shot halfway up his forehead.
“Are you joking? Haven’t you been around Thompsons Hill or anything?”
“Never. Who the fuck does that?”
“God.” Henry sighed.

The train begun to speed up to less of a roll and more of an inte--nt cruise. Liam got up to explore the views outside the window and Henry returned to his book. A comfortable, perhaps indulgent silence fell between the two of them as they appreciated the company in an otherwise lonely few hours.

Eventually they were back to their seats just looking outside and making remarks about the landscape. A mutual love for nature became apparent through this. It was a lazy half hour in which they said all of nothing, but what was there to say between two strangers? They didn't know.

10pm

"I've never known another person like us." Henry began. "Does your family know? Because mine does and they can be pretty invasive about it. Is it the same for you?" He asked. Both their elbows were propped on the table, their knuckles cradling their chins, enamoured maybe.
"Yeah it's never really been a secret in my family. It's really kind of normal to us all. It's like my sisters got a birthmark over her right eye, my brother's deaf in one ear and I'm… *me*. None of these things phase us but I'm sure they do for other families." He explained.

The train slowed to a stop and the two men poked their heads o--ut the window to see what the trouble was. Their faces were pelted with snowflakes that melted and wet them.

“Must be too much snow on the tracks.” Henry said.
“Yeah.” They both retreated back into the cart, the wind howling as they closed the windows. By this point, they’d established this unspoken game of sorts where they would look at each other in silence and try not to laugh. In the undercurrents of their being around one another there was this humour in it all. And with that humour, a sense that nothing really mattered. Slowly there was a gate being cracked open between the two and it led to this mutual feeling as though they could experiment their humanity on one another. You could be honest and it would have no repercussions. You could say pretentious things and no one from your real life would think you took yourself so seriously. But still Henry found himself unable to admit certain things because the slightest chance that something of this became real was too much a risk to bear all.

It wasn’t quite a fever dream or a spell of any sorts – it was a simulation that the both of them were pushing to its limits.

“So this Y2K thing. How d’you think it will unfold?” Liam asked.
“Apocalypse, surely.” He answered.
“But don’t you think that’s catastrophizing?”
“Yeah I’m quite good at that these days.” He started. “Like a crow that hasn’t met any other birds but read a bunch of fables. It thinks of itself only as death this way.” Liam rolled his eyes.
“And who are the fables in your life?” Liam asked, surprised that he was following.
“Family, friends- I mean they all think I’m this wheelhouse of destruction and I think I believe it.” The conversation had soured into something less indulgent.

Henry had forged this peak in the conversation and Liam had given up on meeting it. He swirled his straw around in his glass and offered something.

“Well I don’t think you’re very destructive.” This he thought would be enough to bring everything back down to cool. But Henry was spiteful that he had had to act in such an order.
“Well you don’t know me.” He said.

“I think most of the time you know everything you need to know about a person within the first few hours of meeting them. If you’re good at reading body language and reading into speech patterns and whatnot.” Liam insisted. “You’re right though. I don’t know much about you at all really. But I do know that you haven’t loved anyone and maybe there’s a reason for that.” He said. This stung Henry in the same way that removing debris from a cut does.
“No, I do think I’m a bit hesitant to believe that people could love me.” He said.
“D’you think that’s because your family is a bit dickish about you?” Liam asked. Henry looked out the window.
“Yeah. I do.” The snow outside stopped falling and the side of a mountain became clear through its recession. Liam was inspired.
“You’re their creation.” Liam said. “Who are *you*?”

11pm

The train had stopped about 200 metres from the base of a mountain that the two men were looking at passively, as if it were just a hole in the wall. That is until Henry remembered Liam's confession that he had never climbed a mountain.
"We're going to be stuck here for a while." Henry said.
"Yeah. At least an hour or two. I think we were supposed to get back at 2 in the morning. It'll be a bit later now." Liam said.

The two of them found a coffee machine and started making cu--ps to keep themselves awake. They were simply enjoying the quietness of the train too much. So infrequently were they disturbed by someone waking up to use the bathroom. They still sat in the dark anyway, enjoying how it washed out the cabin in shades of blue. How the cabin itself was darker than the sky outside.

“You said that you’ve never climbed a mountain before.” Henry said.
“Yeah. Well what’s really the point?” Liam asked.
“The view mate!”
“Oh. Yeah I suppose.” He said.
“This train is gonna be here for at least two hours, you said that yourself. That mountain over there” He pointed to it. “would be an easy climb.” He smiled at the idea of giving Liam such an experience.
“Are you saying we should climb it? Like now?” He asked.
“Why not?”

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The air outside was insultingly cold, though as they moved they warmed up. The wind had completely died down and as they gained leverage on the train they saw a pile of snow *had* fallen in front of the conductor's car.

“They won’t clear that for hours. There’s more packed behind it. Even as they shovel it away, more will just keep falling. They’ll have to barricade it or shovel it.” Henry said.
“You’re very fascinating.” Liam said. “Smart.” They smiled at each other, faces framed by the pull strings of their hoods. The two of them kept walking up the hill, conversing about anything as they seemed to do.

“So where do you live now?” Liam asked. The snow compacted beneath their feet as they walked, squelching.
“Chelsea.” Henry answered. “You?” He asked.
“Technically I still live in Crawley actually. That’s where all of my stuff is but I sort of run around and do what I want. I work in places where I can live like camps and wineries and such.” He explained.
“Ah, so you’re a bit of a nomad?” Henry asked.
“For sure.”

“I’m the same I suppose. But I’ll be honest, I don’t have to work while I do it. My parents have money which I hate admitting because it comes with assumptions.” He said.
“What? Like that you’re a posh prick?” Liam asked rhetorically. They both laughed. They were about halfway up the mountain by this point.

They stumbled across a slight crevice that risked a nasty fall, but they had to cross it in order to keep climbing the mountain. They debated heading back but Henry convinced Liam that it would be fine. Liam jumped across first, physically involved, and then helped Henry across by holding out his hand. With a slight stumble on the lip of the crevice, they had both made it across and continued the climb.
“Your hands are cold.” Liam said quite loudly, concerned.
“Oh it’s fine. They’ve well got feeling still.” He assured Liam.

“So where are you headed after you pick up the ashes?” Liam asked.
“Well I’ve got to give them back to her family first-” Henry started. He realised that he’d told Liam something that he didn’t want to at this point.
“Oh.” Liam said. They stopped walking. Henry felt a sense as if he had broken down a wall and thought there was no point in lying anymore.
“I’ll stop bullshitting. They’re my girlfriend's ashes. She died on Christmas Eve.” He said quietly. Condensation loomed from their mouths. Liam subtly stepped closer.
“I’m so sorry.” He offered. They hugged for a few moments and then separated.
“No it’s uh- it’s ok. She was sick.” He said. “Most of that grief happens long before they die. It was a relief. She was in a lot of pain but she’s okay now.” He swiped the bottom of his nose. Liam offered an empathetic look. They kept walking, maybe three quarters up by now.

“What about you?” Henry asked as he stepped over a rock.
“Where am I headed? Oh I don’t know. I was actually thinking about going overseas next. Might take my things back to Crawley and then head to the US or something. New York maybe.”
“So you must have broken up recently?” Henry asked.
“I think it was the day before I left for Plymouth. So the 17th.” Liam answered, sliding a little on some ice.
“Why’d you split?”
“It was a long time coming.” Liam said. “We haven’t really liked each other for months now and we just started cheating and then pretending to be sorry. I don’t know why we hung on as long as we did if I’m honest.” Henry was trailing slightly behind.
“I don’t imagine *you* dumped *her.*” Henry said.
“No.” He replied. “No, I believed at one point that I’d marry her. That was about a year ago now though.”
“You’ll find someone.” Henry said.
“You too.” Liam said, staring off into the distance.
“Nah.” He shook his head. “I’ll love her for a long time. There might be room for others-” He looked up at Liam who had stopped for a moment to let him catch up.
“But it’ll be her forever I think.” He finished.
Liam hadn’t stopped to let Henry catch up. He stopped because they had finally reached the top of the mountain.

12am

The view from the top of the mountain was underwhelming, maybe even quite eerie. But the train looked like a model from the top and they could see a few of its lights were on. The ones on either end and then one of the cabins. They tried to make out any action inside of it but despite a glimpse of a man slipping on a cardigan, nothing.

The view in the opposite direction was just a large sheet of snow across a valley. On the far side of it stood a little house with all of its lights out. It had a fenced backyard that was about three times the size of the house and a driveway that led onto a road between two mountains. They just stood there, staring out at the world beneath them. “I’d love to live in a house like that. In a spot like this.” One of them said, the other agreed. This was by far the quietest part of the

night, at least in volume. Many emotions were flung around like insults and compliments to others past or future.

Henry stood and watched the house while Liam looked at the train. Soon enough they found themselves standing closely next to one another. Shoulders touching, skin indicative of something greater. That sense of boundary between them was completely broken once Henry revealed the loss of his girlfriend and Liam likened it to his own recent break up. There on top of the mountain stood a man who was at the edge of everything he had known, ready to leave. And another man who was beginning to understand his own freedom.

“I think you’re alright Liam.” Henry said as they stared off at the train below.
“Mm?” Liam looked over at him, noticing the intricacies of his face for the first time.
“This is undeniably romantic.” Henry said. Their knuckles clunked against each other.
“Aren’t we lucky?” Liam asked.
“I suppose.” The other huffed.

Liam stepped away to the exit off the top of the mountain when Henry said something. He wasn’t sure he had him properly so he asked him to repeat it.

“If I was ever going to fall in love again. I’d do it with someone like you Liam.” That’s what he said.
“But you believe that you can’t.” He replied.
“I can’t.” A tear rolled down his cheek. “And I wish I could. And I know that if I tried then I’d just hurt myself and whoever it was that was like you. She just means too much to me and I feel like moving on is such an insane disrespect.” He said in shallow breaths. Liam remained on the other side of the crest. It was a great vulnerability for Henry to say such things and he was unsure what it was about Liam

that brought it out in him. They were strangers, which did make it easier to confess these things. But he had decided only a few hours ago that he would never let Liam know these things. But it was as if inside those secrets and sensitivities lay a magnet, and Liam was another that pulled it out. It wasn't in Henry's hands anymore. And now it was midnight and they should be asleep but they were instead confessing a strange sense of belonging to and about one another.

"I don't know if this will make anything clearer… but I feel like I've known you for years Henry. Years. So I'll go out on a limb and say that the best thing you can do is believe that you deserve love. Otherwise you'll get pneumonia and be choked of the thing that keeps us alive. I don't care who it is that you do that with. But I care that you don't let your grief get in the way of your actual life. You should be happy. That's the only thing you *should* do." He said. Henry closed his eyes as Liam said this and took it in. It invaded him in a way that felt good. *You should be happy.*

"Well why don't we just take this night for ourselves?" He stared down at the house and then back at Liam. Then, without a second thought, he turned his back to the house and followed Liam back down the hill who told him to come down.

1am

The second they got back on to the train, they shed everything they built of themselves on the top of the mountain. They got back on the train via the door next to Liam's cabin and started walking in single file down the hallways. Liam's cabin was on the far side of the train from Henry's so they would have to walk through a few carriages to go from one side to the other.

The first carriage of course was Liam's. He showed Henry his r--oom and the stuff in his carry on including a rubix cube and some clothes and gifts from his family in Plymouth. Then they looked out the window for a closer look at the pile of snow in front of the train that had been considerably cleared. They presumed that they would now get to London by 6am.

They left Liam’s cabin and skipped down past the 4 others in the car.

The second carriage was a general area for sitting. Green vinyl seats lined the walls and were sandwiched with wooden tables that were stained a deep honey colour. The aisle in the centre was so small that only one of them could pass through at a time. Liam took Henry by the hand and led him to the next carriage.

Then they were in the dining carriage where they had met for the first time and talked for hours at this point. Liam hadn’t let go of Henry’s warm hand. They made themselves a coffee each and giggled to themselves as they loomed around each other like a housecat at your feet.

Any stranger would assume that these two men had been together for at least a year and that this was a honeymoon of sorts. But it was really the 5th delirious hour of their night together and it showed no signs of slowing. They finished drinking their coffees and just laughing with each other before they headed off for the fourth carriage.

The fourth carriage was another one full of cabins. However there were only three in this one and between them was a small little sitting area with a coffee table. They noticed that on the table was an empty mug and a book that looked drenched. It was a copy of a book from the 1890’s about a woman who never gets to experience any night life in the city and slowly goes insane because of it.

The two of them sat there, flicking through the pages and maki--ng jokes about the predicament and snickering at each other. Keeping quiet so as not to wake anyone up with their antics. Once they realised they were getting too loud they decided to get up and head off to the next carriage. Liam took Henry by the hand again and they skipped through. They’d pull on each other's arm to whisper little things to one other about how they feel or what they can see.

“I think someones awake onboard.” Henry said in Liam’s ear.
“Yeah, *us*.” He answered. Henry laughed at this.
“No that’s not what I meant at all-” His voice was dramatic.
The fifth carriage was entirely empty. There were no seats, no tables or even windows but it was incredibly warm. In any other circumstance, either one of them would have skipped right through. But their erraticness made them jump around it and tap on the walls like they were drumming.

They shouldered the walls and bounced off onto each other and started doing all sorts of rolls and tumbles with the empty space. “10! 10! 10!” They would call out as if they were scoring gymnasts. They collapsed onto the floor and started playing with the acoustics of the room by making little bird calls and singing stupid songs. Then they realised that the next carriage was where the food was kept and after climbing the mountain they were starved.

So they entered the carriage and for the first time, flicked on the lights. This was the first time since 8pm that they had seen each other's faces in real lighting. And it was significant because there was now a soul to put to those faces, a story. When Liam turned on the lights, he turned around to face Henry who had the widest smile on his face. And for a moment, snow begun to fall again. They just stared at each other, unabashedly smiling.

Henry’s hair, so textured. Liam’s eyes, so shallow. Henry’s, so c--utting. Liam’s lips, naturally smiling. Henry’s arms, so defined. Really, they *saw* each other for the first time. And there was so much beauty between them that neither could deny that love would exist in abundance if they wanted it to, even if it was just for a night. They weren’t hungry after studying one another. Instead they were so occupied with this unspoken fascination with the other. The giddy romance of a one-night love had left them in place of this profound, shared experience. It was entirely the experience of witnessing how

inconsistent life's emotions really are. There's no plan about grief or love or sex or snow; they all just come and go as they please. And neither of them cared to forecast these things in the moment. A primal urge to act on your hearts wavering desires.

Again, Liam took Henry by the hand and slowly they walked through the carriage. Liam opened the door to the next one. This time the carriages were properly separated meaning that they would have to brave the coldness outside as they crossed the joint that bridged the two. Liam went first, showing Henry how to cross safely and not step on moving parts. When he finished crossing, he took both of Henry's hands. Before he crossed, they looked each other in the eyes, making note of the moment as such a unique thing. Light flashed in their eyes and struck their hearts. It would be grand. And they kissed. They separated. Then they kissed again and did so until they could hardly breathe anymore. Neither wanted to let go.

They shared the moment together as if it were their right to do s--o. They didn't care if it was wrong for Henry to do such a thing. They didn't care that it was late and they were most likely delirious. They didn't care because in the moment it just felt *good* to let everything go for a moment. They were together for many moments, leaning into each other and pushing and pulling until out of the corner of their eye, a light in a distant carriage turned on. It startled them and then ran off into the carriage where Henry was supposed to be sleeping. And not once did they let go of each other.

2am

Henry's cabin was of course small and windowless, but Liam couldn't have cared less. If Henry was in there then he was happy. And what's more, traces of Henry were all around the room. His books and spare shoes and leather bound journal were all there. Fragments of this man he had come to know over the last 6 hours. And it was reassuring that nothing about Henry's items surprised him. He hadn't just known some things about him. Liam *knew* him. Or so he thought.

The moment between the carriages was on both of their minds though neither of them would admit it. So they just sat on either end of the bed and played silly games with their hands. Shadow puppets, thumb wars, chopsticks. What was most notable about the two of them was how much laughter was shared between them.

It seemed that everything they did made someone laugh and they were constantly appreciating the others' humour. These moments in Henry's cabin were undeniably the most tender and the ones that would be remembered best. They would remember the cold pink walls and the blankets that were the colour of sleep. They would remember the plastic smell of the room and the distant sound of snow being shovelled and their wild speech. It was vivid, even in the moment.

Eventually the games stopped and the laughter made way for more intimate conversation. Liam rested his head on Henry's chest, Henry held one of Liam's arms and stroked his hair with the other. Slow moments, strung out through the hour in which the slightest movement feels like an earthquake. Stillness aplenty and rewarded by slight hums. He just stroked his hair, and he just let him.

"What if the world doesn't end in a week?" Henry asked softly. Liam could feel his heartbeat thumping on the side of his head.
"What about it? You don't seriously think it will, right?"
"I wouldn't mind." He mumbled. "But how would it affect this whole night?" He asked.
"Do you think you'd regret it?" Liam asked. Henry thought about who Liam had become to him in these short but packed hours.
"I think I'd regret not having kept you around. I don't want to get off this train and have to leave you behind." He shuffled a little so Liam would cover more of his chest.

“I mean we have phone numbers for a reason. Just have mine.” Liam said. He got up and looked around for Henry’s journal that was sitting next to his duffel bag, tucked under the bed. He pulled the journal open and without noticing the words written in it, he scribbled his number down and wrote his name next to it with a heart.

A heavy feeling dropped inside of Henry as he did this. Liam laid back down in the same way as before and they just laid there in silence for many minutes, listening to each other breathe like waves on the shore.

Henry thought to himself how interesting it is that so many human functions resemble things in nature. Like the crashing of waves versus breaths. Like those trees in Yemen that bleed when they’re cut. Then he got to thinking about how sap has been used in history as art. *Humans use nature to express themselves I suppose.* The mountain shot across his mind. The impulsivity too. He couldn’t just let this go. He couldn’t just move on.

“This might be out of your interest Liam but do you ever think about art?” Henry asked, the volume of his voice slightly too high.
“No. Not really. Why?” He scraped the underside of his fingernail.
“I don’t know. I’ve just been thinking about how openly we’ve expressed our feelings tonight and how there’s a sort of practice about that. It makes me wonder if conversation is an art.” He laughed a little at how absurd this sounded. Liam didn’t. This is what the night had become about. It was about saying what you want and doing what you want with whoever. Reasons varying but at the core of them was likely pleasure.

“The kind of conversation and intimacy that we’ve been having isn’t art though, it’s just nature. You saying that I’m the kind of person you’d want to be with wasn’t practiced. It was just your instinct.

Nature.” Liam began. “I think a part of nature that might be art is evolution though.” He said. This confused Henry.
“Doesn’t art have to express something though?. If evolution is art then what does it express? And who’s the mind that it comes from?” He implored. Liam sat with the question for a few moments and conjured up an answer: “It’s an expression of our needs. I think I could comfortably say that my hands would grow soft if yours were hard. That’s much more of an art to me than conversation.”

Henry was beyond satisfied with this answer. He was incredibly charmed. He grabbed one of Liam's hands and held it. His other hand snaked down the mattress and settled on Liam’s inner thigh. *Intimacy could also be an art.* He thought to himself. *And we should not be doing this.* Then he remembered some dark paintings he saw in Madrid and their feelings of death and desperation and madness. If his art couldn’t be conversation, then it would be intimacy. And he would channel those three feelings into what he was about to do. There was death in his past, he was desperate to feel whole again and was driven mad by an image that was thrust upon him. These are the demons he would exorcise in what he was about to do, his expression.

He got up, stumbled across the floor to the light switch, made dark of the room and met Liam back in the bed. *This is both nature, and art.*

3am

Liam couldn’t remember the last man he had sex with but he knew that they weren’t as important as Henry was. No man since his first and only boyfriend really cared about him. It was just that quick exchange and then both were on their way. Henry himself had never had sex with a man but assumed the moment with confidence. Choreography.

The walls in the train were thin so they had to be quiet which w--as fine. It was less sex and more embrace because it was in neither of their nature to approach the situation with apathy. If their future was uncertain then they would at the very least appreciate their current presence.

Liam remembered how it all felt quite easily. He adjusted well to someone else's presence in all different ways of his body. He knew how to make someone feel welcome and appreciated in a way that made them feel special. He knew the language of moments like these and what felt best.

Henry was learning as they went; learning what Liam wanted and how he wanted him to do it. Learning what the touch of a man even really feels like. This sense of discovery was exciting to Henry and he

knew it would only last for the first time. However one thing that he never mastered was eye contact and out of everything in these moments, that was the only real shame either of them felt.

Henry couldn't look his lover in the eyes which was the real mood ring of the act as far as he knew. He could tell that Liam was looking down at him but he couldn't lock himself into the reality of the situation and hold Liam in that final way. To him, it was as if eye contact was the way that the act was made real and how it was affirmed. Neither of which he really wanted. He only really wanted to feel good in the way he had come to know.

Liam would always be the first person that he had done this to. And he was glad really that it was someone like Liam. Someone who understood emotions much more than he ever did. And someone who he could either choose to be with for as long as he thought he would live, or leave on a train platform somewhere in South London.

Liam planted both of his hands on Henry's chest as he looked far into his eyes. Henry grabbed Liams waist and a tear rolled down his cheek, landing on the pillow next to him. No longer could they deny what they had done and what they had said. It was unmistakably an act of romance in Henry's mind but something had shifted for Liam.

He began to feel distant from Henry which was ironic. He began to feel like the man beneath him was frankly a ghost, already becoming a memory. He realised that Henry couldn't look him in the eyes, and through that there was a disconnect. He himself was in that room for casual sex that was fuelled by a brief spark of romance. But Henry was still ashamed of himself and couldn't let that go. The realisation that Henry wasn't having sex with him because he wanted to act on romance twisted like a knife in Liam's chest. He had forgotten that Henry didn't believe in romance anymore. He was having sex with Liam because he thought it would help him forget his past. *Don't let your grief get in the way of your actual life,* Liam had

said to him. But the sex had become loveless, and Liam was not there to do that.

Hanging over Liam now was the reality that this was all they could do. They had a story together with peaks and troughs and all sorts of wonderful conversations, glances, memories and revelations. It just so happened that it all took place in one night. They had lived a lifetime together in the span of seven hours. And as Henry finished and Liam complained none whatsoever, he knew the best of it was over. But he didn't want to spoil the moment with this truth. So he glided off to the restroom and returned in a collapse onto Henry's warm body. He closed his eyes, thinking of Henry's girlfriend. And then he fell asleep.

4am

The snow pile was now nearly entirely gone from the front of the train. The women who's husbands would meet them at the train station woke up and began putting on their makeup and nice expensive blouses. The sun had begun to break over the mountain where few people remained asleep. Breakfast started being served, birds started swooping around and the snow once again glistened like the dust of stars. It was morning.

5am

When the two men woke up, they heard cutlery and conversation from the carriages further up. What they had feared became true. There were no more moments to be alone which is why it took them so long to get out of bed. They left the cabin twenty minutes apart so no one knew they spent the night together. Henry left first, and as he did the train started moving again. He sat down in the spot where he had met Liam just 9 hours ago.

Liam shortly followed after and as he entered the carriage a man who appeared to be in his forties asked “Weren’t you in the cabin next to me? Why are you coming from that way?” Liam looked at the man and then glanced at Henry who gave him a smile of approval, one that really said *if you have to.*

“I spent the night with that man over there.” He smiled and grabbed a plate of food.

He sat down across from Henry for the last time and placed his cutlery down on the table.
“I thought I’d be reckless. I guess in your mind we’ve got what? Two days left before we know if we’re dead?” He said. Henry laughed with a mouth full of food.
“I don’t know if I believe that anymore. Or if I do then I’ll ignore it until it either happens or be relieved when it doesn’t.” He replied.
“Relieved now?” Liam asked.
“Yeah I figure that if the night taught us anything then it’s that I should stop moping around. My girlfriend is dead and I shouldn’t really dwell on it.” Henry said. Liam frowned.

“I’ll call you tonight. Is the number your mobile?” Henry asked.
“Yeah. But you don’t have to. I don’t really see the point.” Liam replied.
“Well maybe I want to see you again.” Henry explained.
“Maybe that’s not a good idea.” Liam replied. Henry looked confused, tilted his head and sunk his eyebrows.
“Did you not like last night?” He asked sincerely.
“Never mind it.” Liam replied. And it was just like the night before.
“I think I’ll be able to forget how sad I am about my girlfriend soon. I’ll be able to move on with someone like you. Or even you specifically if you hang around.” Henry beamed.

The truth is that Liam didn’t like the way that Henry had perceived the night before. He didn’t like that Henry had made out that Liam taught him anything, let alone the idea that he shouldn’t let himself grieve such a great loss.

He was reminded in this moment that he never really knew Hen--ry and that Henry never really knew him. From the moment that they saw each other last night to the moment that Henry had left Liam’s body, they never stopped being strangers. And this is what Liam knew Henry hadn’t picked up on.

“You don’t really love me Henry. And that’s okay. But I realised last night that we did what we did for two very different reasons. I wasn’t trying to make you forget your girlfriend, I was just trying to prove to you that you’re capable of loving new people. But maybe you aren’t just yet which I can’t believe I even have to say. And I apologise if I wasn’t clear enough in my intentions. But you need to be there for your girlfriend at the moment. And even in the future, don’t forget her, just apply the love she gave you to other people. Soon enough there’ll be fragments of her everywhere. If she taught you how to hold a hand real nice then do that with other people. If she taught you how to call someone ‘babe’ in a way that isn’t awkward then do that with other people. After some time she might not cross your mind every time you do it but she’ll always be the reason you do. Just don’t shut yourself off in her memory. You both deserve more than that.” He said.

Henry stared at Liam like a mirror and his heart began to race. He knew that Liam was right and knew that as much as it hurt to be told it, he needed to have been told.

He let Liam love him all night long, and he quite subtly loved Liam through the night. But as they sat across from one another in the daylight with wet eyes, he understood that the love all along was misguided and born out of this desperation to quieten everything. If Henry kept Liam around outside of that train, he would only ever be reminded of the version of himself that he was before it happened. Liam would be remembered as a pivotal moment in Henry’s journey toward a world filled with acceptance. But he should only be *remembered.*

Breakfast wrapped up and the two men followed each other to their rooms and talked as they packed their belongings up. They talked about the dinner, and the attempts to sleep, and the reunion and the

mountain and the kiss between carriages and the conversation on art and the sex.

But none of it was spoken about with a sense of grief. Henry w--as just happy that in the end, he had learned that even as relationships fail, they teach him. And despite his reluctance to have been assigned any teaching, Liam was happy to have helped. There, in one's room, they kissed with their bags at their feet and the train came to a stop.

6am

On the platform, the two men held their suitcases and carry ons. They stood next to each other as they waited for their taxis to pick them up. There was very little conversation but there didn't even need to be any. The bond between the two had served its purpose and anything that was said after was just a formality. The city was roaring around them and the people were frantic. They themselves seemed to be the eye of the storm really.

A small black car pulled in to the curb and the man with the rub--ix cube got in it. He smiled at the other man through the car window and the driver sped off into the city where millions of people could possibly love him. The man with the leather journal who was left on the platform thought about all of those people who he had never met and laughed about it.

After a few minutes a second black car pulled into the curb and the man with the leather journal stood next to it. He turned around to look at the train station, took a deep breath in and got inside the taxi. As the car rolled off and made its way to the city, the man opened the journal and stared at the phone number that was left in it. He looked

up, closed the journal and smiled at no one except the everliving world.